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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Charles Blondin

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



THIS WEEK

By ARBA N. MOULTON, Editor

An Abraham Lincoln story.

At one time some politicians of the west called at the White House excited and very much perturbed about the sins of commission or omission of the Administration. They eagerly explained to Lincoln the path he should follow.

"Gentlemen," he said at length, after listening patiently to them, "Suppose all the property you were worth was in gold and this you had placed in the hands of Blondin to carry across the Niagara river on a rope. Would you shake the cable and keep shouting at him: 'Blondin, stand up a little straighter; Blondin, stoop a little more, go a little faster, go a little slower, lean a little more to the south'? No, you would hold your breath, as well as your tongue, and keep your hands off until he got safely over.

"The government is carrying an enormous weight. Untold treasure is in its hands. Don't badger it. Keep silence and it will get you safely across."

It is doubtful if many of the young people of today ever heard of Blondin, but to the boys of sixty and seventy years ago he was a great hero. He must have been a great hero to be referred to as he was by the great President Lincoln.

Charles Blondin was a French acrobat, and Blondin was not his real name at all. He had a long French name which he changed when he came over to America to make his fortune.

He was already known as "The Little Wonder," when on June 30, 1859, he performed a feat which had never before been accomplished, and, so far as we know, has never since been equalled.

Before a crowd of 25,000 persons he crossed the Niagara Falls on a tight rope in five minutes. On the Fourth of July, four days later, he crossed on the rope blind-folded, trundling a wheelbarrow.

On the 19th of August he carried a man across on his back, and on the 14th of September, 1860, he crossed on stilts in the presence of the Prince of Wales.

He then went back to France and lived for a while on his reputation. But a man of his daring disposition cannot long remain idle. He was like the stunt airplane flyers of today. An

impelling force urges them on to new feats of daring, until they plunge to their death or their energy is exhausted.

Blondin returned to the United States in 1889 when he was 64 years old and gave a series of exhibitions on Staten Island, performing many extraordinary feats; one of them to carry a stove to the center of a line stretched high in the air, and make an omelet on it.

He went back to Europe and kept up his performances until a few months before his death, which occurred in London in 1897.





